

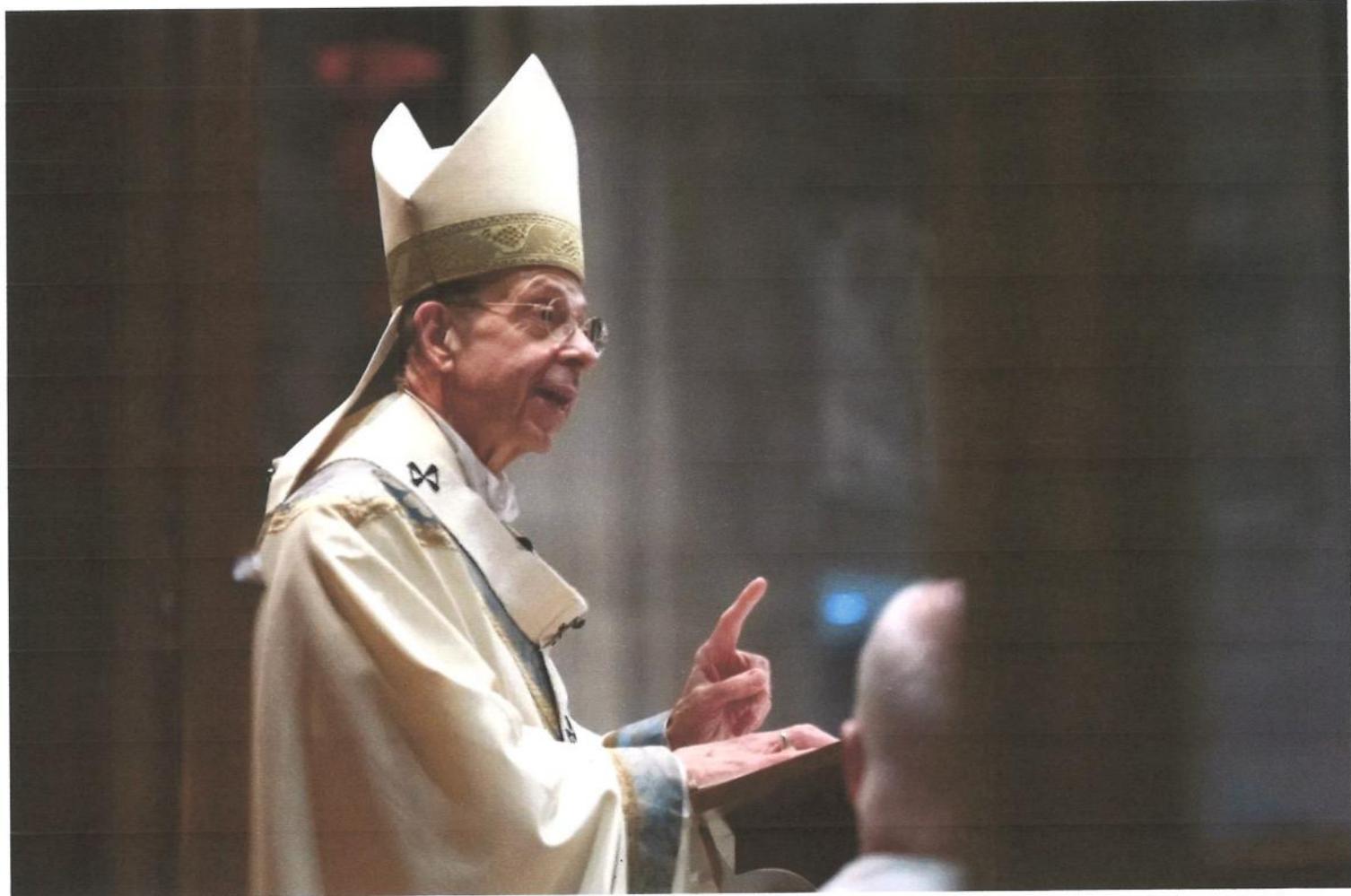
EXHIBIT P 21

SHORT TAKE

Baltimore's Archbishop Lori: Bankruptcy was the only way to compensate abuse victims and continue our ministries

by William E. Lori

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Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori addresses the congregation at the Chrism Mass on April 3, 2023, at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Baltimore. (KOSV News photo/Kevin J. Parks, Catholic Review)

In 2012, Pope Benedict XVI appointed me archbishop of Baltimore, the oldest diocese in the United States. I consider it an honor and a privilege to have been entrusted with the spiritual care of the faithful of what is known as the birthplace of Catholicism in the United States. At the time of my appointment, I knew I would

be following in the footsteps of such predecessors as John Carroll and James Gibbons, whose service looms large in the history of our church in the United States. I would also soon learn that my tenure would be marked by the acts of men such as Joseph Maskell and John Merzbacher, whose serial sexual abuse of children in the 1960s and '70s left indelible scars on both their victims and the archdiocese.

On Sept. 29, I announced the historic decision to seek Chapter 11 reorganization under the U.S. Bankruptcy Code. This will help the archdiocese manage the flood of lawsuits that is anticipated following a new Maryland law, which took effect a few days later, and which permanently eliminates the statute of limitations for the filing of civil lawsuits in historic cases of child sexual abuse. The decision was at the same time a difficult and easy one for me to make. It was difficult because of the underlying insidious acts perpetrated decades ago against those the church and its ministers failed to protect. But in the end, the decision was easy because it was the only clear path that will allow the archdiocese to both equitably compensate victims (though no compensation can fully undo their pain) and continue its ministries, as is my canonical responsibility to ensure.

It is important to note that the decision to seek Chapter 11 reorganization is a legal response to the recent change in Maryland law. In my view, there was little choice but to seek court-supervised reorganization to respond to this new legal reality. Simply put, civil laws require legal responses. But far more significant than our legal obligation to respond to the new law is the moral obligation we have long recognized to respond to the harm brought about by sexual abuse of minors. To be sure, the archdiocese has a moral obligation to account for its past. It would be a mistake, however, to think that such an accounting is just now beginning, or that it has been brought about solely by the passage of the new law.

For decades, the Archdiocese of Baltimore has tried to reckon with its sinful past—and not to hide it, undo it or minimize it—because it had a moral obligation to do so and because atoning for its past was the right and just thing to do. It has attempted to take responsibility for its past, to be accountable to victim-survivors, and to ensure that current and future Catholics are safe and can be confident that their church is a much safer, much different church than it once was. Building off the work of my immediate predecessors (which included the publishing of one of the first public lists of abusive clergy, the establishment of an independent review board and an Office of Child & Youth Protection, and a zero tolerance policy aimed at preventing abuse and keeping youths and others safe), I have made a commitment to help root out abuse from our midst and to make our archdiocese distinctly inhospitable to anyone who would harm a minor.

Longstanding practices aimed at helping to promote healing for victim-survivors include the payment of counseling for anyone reporting abuse. In addition, those who will receive financial settlements resulting from the Chapter 11 process will not be the first to do so. For the last 16 years, the archdiocese has offered mediated financial settlements to those seeking to be in charge of their own therapy and healing. More than 130 victim-survivors have received such financial settlements already, even though the archdiocese was not legally obligated to offer such financial support. We did, however, feel morally obligated to do so.

The choice now to file for Chapter 11 reorganization, therefore, is not a way to avoid our financial responsibility to those harmed in our care. It is precisely the opposite. Based on the experience of other dioceses where lawsuits led to settlements and judgments that quickly depleted church assets, we elected a path forward that allows all victim-survivors to get something, instead of just those who are first to the courthouse. I recognize there is a skeptical view that such a decision is meant to protect or shield church assets, which some think are limitless. On the contrary, our assets are indeed limited, and once our liabilities are met each year, whatever surplus is left is spent to support parishes, schools and other Catholic ministries, including those serving those who rely on the church for critical material support.

Having met for decades with those abused by clergy and other representatives of the church, I have heard how much harm was done, how much pain was inflicted and how much suffering continues. I have heard of the innocence taken, the relationships damaged and the livelihoods impacted, and I know and believe fully that the church has a moral obligation to do what it can for those harmed. I also recognize that I cannot alone bring about their healing and thus want only to ensure that in taking responsibility for our historic wrongs, we rightly play some role in assisting victims in their lifelong journey of recovery. I pray they feel heard, believed, affirmed and loved by the church. I am deeply remorseful for this historic archdiocese's past sins of commission and omission vow we will continue to do everything possible to ensure what they endured will never be visited upon another child or vulnerable individual in the church's care.

Finally, it is my hope that this historic decision and the painful but necessary process it leads to will, once completed, allow the entire archdiocese to heal. With representatives of the church and victim-survivors coming together to agree upon a final path forward, I pray this will represent a new beginning, a new day, not only for survivors but for our entire church, which has long sought a way to, once and for all, reckon with its past and its responsibility to those harmed.

The intended settlement agreement reached at the conclusion of this process will, for right or for wrong, end the specter of legal and financial repercussions that have been hanging over the entire church for decades, even those most of those who committed abuses are no longer around to see and be accountable for the devastation of their actions. Working with the courts, we will vigorously and very publicly encourage anyone with a claim for past harm to come forward to participate in this process so we can be sure all who deserve to be heard and compensated get that chance while it is possible for us to make it happen.

Sadly, we recognize that the pain for survivors will not end at the conclusion of this process. Nor will our effort to journey alongside those who will let us do so come to an end. But it does mean that for the first time since this horrific scandal first came to light in our archdiocese, there is hope for a way forward, together, in the light of Christ's love.

I am grateful to have been asked to serve here and to help lead this historic archdiocese out of the darkness of its past. I hope to lead us into a future that I pray is far brighter for the courageous victim-survivors and their families, for all the faithful, and for those generations that will follow.

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